

# Cross Currents

Newsletter of the Haydenville Congregational Church  
December 2009 *Open Hearts & Open Minds & Open Doors*

## FROM THE PASTOR



Every year at this time I worry that people are hoping Christmas will do too many things for them. I found this sentiment stated well in a book I am reading called Unplug the Christmas Machine. The authors, Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli, write the following about our

hopes for Christmastime: "People want Christmas to strengthen their family bonds, give their spirits a lift in the dark days of winter, stimulate their compassion and generosity, help them keep tabs on far-flung friends, confirm their deepest religious beliefs, show off their skills as hosts and hostesses, establish their rank in the social order...the list goes on and on. And no one celebration can do it all." Robinson and Staeheli suggest that each of us engage in a little values-clarification exercise to help us decide which parts of Christmas are most deserving of our time, attention, love and effort. "Once you have decided that," the authors write, "you will be able to plan a celebration that is in harmony with your deepest beliefs and most expressive of who you are as an individual." To complete their values-clarification exercise, read through the following 10 value statements, cross off those that have no importance to you, and add any important ones that are not included in the list. Then decide what of the remaining values is most important to you. Put a "1" beside that sentence, then a "2" beside the next most important value. Continue until each statement has been assigned a number. Even a value that has low priority can be important to you. Remember: 1 is the highest and 10 the lowest. Here is their list:

- Christmas is a time to be a peacemaker, within my family and the world at large.
- Christmas is a time to enjoy being with my immediate family.

- Christmas is a time to create a beautiful home environment.
- Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ.
- Christmas is a time to exchange gifts with my family and friends.
- Christmas is a time for parties, entertaining, and visits with friends.
- Christmas is a time to help those who are less fortunate.
- Christmas is a time to strengthen bonds with my relatives.
- Christmas is a time to strengthen my church community.
- Christmas is a time to be relaxed and renewed.

My dear Church brothers and sisters, I invite you to do this little exercise—as I have done—and to ponder the results. I think clarifying for ourselves and our families what matters most to us at Christmastime will help us create the Advent and Christmas we want and need to have. It was surprising to me to see how low I placed #5 on the list: "Christmas is a time to exchange gifts with my family and friends." I made that a low priority so I must ask myself: do I want to spend tons of time at the mall and shopping downtown if this is not so important to me? I don't know about you but I want my Christmas to be about my family, my Church and my God. I want to have roaring fires, sit around with my loved ones, enjoy all the Sundays of Advent and Christmas Eve with my Church family, and think deeply about the glory and awe of Jesus' humble birth. I think this year I want to slow down, pray more, shop less, and warm cider on the stove while I think about the birth of a radiant being who touched and changed my life and walks with me each and every day. I think the more I am able to "unplug the Christmas machine," the more "Christ" I will find in Christmas.

Love and Blessings,

## A MESSAGE FROM MATILDA



*O God, in the darkness of the world's pain, the blessed light begins to kindle. In the darkness of our own doubting of thee and of ourselves, the great hope begins to rise again... Be born among us so that we may ourselves be born. Be born within us that by words and deeds of love we may bear the tidings of the birth to a world that dies for lack of love.. We ask it in the child's name...-Fredrick Buechner*

Dear Friends,

I know we are all gearing up for the Advent season and preparing for all that means for us, joyful and bittersweet alike. It is an honor for me to be celebrating my fifth Advent with you, as I was first your intern and am now in my fourth year as Assistant Pastor and Coordinator of Youth and Family Ministries.

Through this dark month it is a joy to eat corn chowder at the church fair, muscle our way through the Stewardship campaign, and get ready for the season of waiting and hoping... There are also some changes in my position at the Church beginning this fall. As you know I was called to be Andrea's Assistant Pastor in 2005, which was an honor for me as a Yale Divinity School student who was not yet an ordained minister in the UCC. At that point I also took over the leadership of what was then the Sunday School Program, which was run by a dedicated volunteer, and built on it to create our Children's Church. As we have proceeded, the program(s) have grown. In total we have over 30 young people involved. In addition, we have interested youth and teens of Confirmation age whose spiritual lives need to be nurtured and tended. Therefore the trustees voted this fall to dedicate 95% of my part time position at Haydenville to the Youth and Family Ministries, in order to make our program into something that can be sustained and flourish now and in years to come.

The capital campaign is upon us, and as Andrea and I keep saying, we are "growing up" as a church. You have all stepped up to "be the body of Christ" and to support Andrea and me and our lay leaders in the pastoral work that keeps us knit together as a family. And while I know that we will miss seeing each other for the duration of the adult worship service on Sunday mornings, and I will miss helping with liturgy and preaching often, I am dedicated to this plan and feel it is the best thing for our church family for now. This re-alignment of my time is effective until the end of the CC year, at which point we will re-evaluate our needs and priorities. In the meantime, I will miss seeing and visiting you and collaborating on projects—but it is all for the sake of the kids who are the future of our church

and our world! ***In addition, please keep in mind that all that is changing is the manner in which I spend my time, and not my "call" to the church or my dedication to this community.*** I will be "around" just as much as always, just prioritizing and family activities and participating in our effort to make the best possible invitation and home for the Holy Spirit in our Youth and Family programs. I thank you all for the support you have given to Children's Church this fall and look forward to our continued work together.

In faith and gratitude,  
Matilda

## CHURCH BOOK GROUP NEWS!

By Paula Spencer

Church Book Group News: We'll next meet on December 12 at 9:30, location TBA. We're reading Tracy Kidder's new book Strength in What Remains, the true story of a young doctor in training who flees from genocide in Burundi, comes to the U.S. and faces nearly overwhelming obstacles but ultimately finishes medical school and returns to his country. Please join us.



## SHOW US THE DOUGH!

By Lynn Fogg

Whoever thought talking about money could be this much fun? But indeed it has been a blast being a member of this year's Stewardship Committee. There has been a special energy in the air ever since our first Stewardship Meeting, right up until the time we handed out the Pledge envelopes. During that month, we spoke as a group about our mutual love of this Church and how it provides us with so many different things.

We all agreed through the process that giving back financially to our Church was something we were all committed to do. And so for me, it was joyful to listen each Sunday to the powerful Stewardship Moments, that reflected how we, as Stewardship Committee members, were thinking about how to discern individual pledge amounts. We also tried to make this an experiential Stewardship Season, from blessing the Bread of Fear, Matzoh, to giving out friendship bread loaves at "Bring a Friend to Church" Sunday; from experiencing what it felt like to give dollar bills away to unsuspecting people to learning that one of our congregants owns "Batman" checks!

I have so enjoyed all of these rich experiences, as I hope others of you have. My hope and my prayer is that each of us will dig deep and give until, as Pastor Andrea has said, "it feels really, really good!"

## WHAT I LEARNED AT EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP CLASS

By Cherylann Richards



Dear HCC friends,

In October I had the opportunity to attend exploring membership classes. I was looking forward to learning what HCC chooses to teach and hoping to be able to add something to the classes. As it turned out I was invited to share what I know of UCC history and polity (how we choose to govern ourselves in the UCC). This is an area that excites me as I developed a deep pride and love of the UCC in my polity class last year and I enjoyed sharing what I had learned. But I also learned something. There is a part of the class where group members discuss what they get and what they give if they decide to become members. As the group members discussed what they believed they would receive and what they would give as "members," I realized I really had no idea of what choosing membership over friendship meant to me. After listening to them I found myself thinking about it over several days and even writing about it. This is what I finally decided I think membership means. When one chooses membership one makes a commitment to *become one of the many ministers of the church*. Having been given a place to learn, grow, and perhaps heal, one decides to begin or expand service to the church as a minister of the church. One decides this particular church is worth supporting with a personal commitment to be certain that it always exists to serve members, friends, the community, and the next new person who walks through the door.

## COFFEE HOUR FOOD: HERE'S THE LINE-UP

Delicious goodies (baked goods, fruit, cheese and crackers, nuts, veggies and dip) appear each and every week because YOU bring them for our Coffee Hour! Thank you so much. Remember the week you bring food, you also help set up and clean up Coffee Hour. Here's the December line-up:

December 6: H, I, J, K

December 13: L, M, N, O

December 20: P, Q, R, S

December 27: T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z



## A CLASS ACT

By Lynn Fogg

In Fellowship Hour after Church, one Sunday in October, I was speaking with Dana Gillette. She informed me that in the organization she works for, Andrea Ayvazian is the epitome of a Class Act! She currently serves in the role of Senior Pastor at Haydenville Congregational Church. Her life's work, however, has been one of advocacy for the underprivileged, while simultaneously having a fierce commitment to peace and justice & speaking out about anti-racism and anti-oppression. Her Doctorate Degree in Philosophy, (emphasis on Racial and Ethnic Studies), as well as her Master's Degree in Divinity have also served her well in advocating for those on the margins of power. Working closely with members of the Class Action organization, her leadership has been instrumental in helping our Church to establish a Committee with a dedicated focus on classism work, in conjunction with other church communities in the Pioneer Valley.

There is no one more deserving of recognition than Andrea, who for many, many years has been a tireless supporter of many individuals in underserved and marginalized environments. Over the last 4+ years, she has built, with a shared leadership model, a strong Church Congregation of 125+ members. Our church has a strong social justice agenda, has a heavy emphasis on mission work, and is GLBT friendly. Andrea Ayvazian's leadership and advocacy is what has built this environment of sensitivity and inclusiveness, to help others regardless of race, creed, class or ethnicity. Andrea has educated us, over and over again, through seminars and sermons to be sensitive to all the "ISMs." Our particular sensitivity to classism, is reflected in being able to recognize the wide range of "classes" within our congregation. We have responded, through Andrea's teaching, by coming together to support each other regardless of one's class.

Please consider my heartfelt nomination of Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian. She has been faithful and effective in breaking down the barriers of classism through her advocacy & teaching. There is no one I know who is more deserving to be recognized as a "Class Act."

## ADVENT DINNER FOR THE MEN IN OUR CHURCH FAMILY

All the men in our Church family are invited to a festive Advent Dinner at the Church with Pastor Andrea on Tuesday, December 15 at 6 PM. We will gather again, as we did in September, to eat good food, visit together, and discuss Church and how things are going for the men in our congregation. All men who are members and friends of the Church are warmly invited. Please let Pastor Andrea know that you are coming so we have enough food prepared (phone: 268.9344 e-mail: revandrea@comcast.net) This will be such fun, hope you can come!

## IS GOD ALL POWERFUL AND/OR ALL LOVING?

By Annie Turner

After Andrea's wonderful sermon about the Book of Job and the problem of suffering, I'm going to try and write about this perplexing, fascinating, and crucial question--is God all powerful and/or all loving?

I am a big fan of the "both/and" philosophy, wonderfully described in the books and CDs of my favorite radical Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr. Both in his CD ("Jesus and Paul, Non-dualistic Thinking) and in his new book, "The Naked Now," Richard says that "either/or" thinking locks us into a way of living and seeing that doesn't allow enough nuance or paradox. He would go so far as to say that "either/or" thinking is at the basis of conflict and violence in the world, and the exclusionary vision of some churches. I believe it is the deepest paradox that God can be all loving, all powerful, and yet have a world filled with violence and cruelty. But then, Jesus loved paradox, as we know—just look at the Beatitudes. Rich is poor. Poor are rich. Hungry are filled—the filled are hungry. And in Paul's letters; the wisdom of this world is foolishness. My strength is made perfect in your weakness. I think Paradox is coded deeply in the DNA of our world.

For me, it is a false dichotomy to say that because of the holocaust, typhoons, or whatever disaster, it means that God is sitting on her hands; that she COULD prevent these disasters if only she so chose. I do believe that we live in a fallen world—it's a metaphor but a true one. This isn't the Garden of Eden—we do not live in paradise. There is a snake—metaphor again—and the evil in this world comes from the human heart. (Wasn't it Solzhenitsyn who said something like, "The line dividing evil from good runs through the human heart.") I think God's heart is the first to break when we are cruel to each other—when we torture, rape, pillage and convert this glorious world into something to be used. I also think that God does intervene in history from time to time; I realize that these interventions can seem random and almost cruel in their unpredictability. But God has said, "My ways are not your ways." I don't know how He makes the decision to intervene or not, but I am content to rest in this mystery, to not have words to frame this conundrum. And the reason I am content is because I have experienced God's mystery—his power—her overwhelming love—in a way that threatens to burst my heart.

I remember my mom, as she was dying from lung cancer many years ago, reading a book called "The Third Peacock on the Left" (about the problem of evil and suffering), by, I think, the rector at St. John's Episcopal. As an example, he spoke of one's car dying and rolling off the snowy road, with us unable to start it again. He said, "God won't come

and start your car for you, but he will come and sit in the snow bank with you." I love that story. But I also believe that God reserves the right to come and start our cars when they die by the wayside. And I am content not to know the answer to this conundrum.

When you asked in your wonderful sermon if we had experienced the God depicted in Job, I would say, "Yes, I have." I don't experience him as a gambler or a "mocker," but I have felt him/her to be the breath of the Holy Spirit who blows away all boundaries between us and nature—the sky, clouds, birds, mist—so that we are at one with creation and with the Spirit who breathes through us. That oneness allows me to nod my head when God says in Job, "Where were you when I created the world?" Where was I indeed?

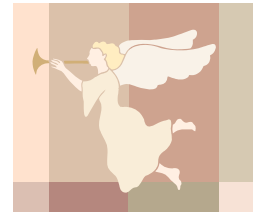
And I believe that when the Gospels say "God is love," they are saying this IS the power of God. This ultimate, gravity-defying, boundary-defying love IS the very power which infuses us and every breathing thing, even to the black reaches of outer space. God, and the Gospels, are saying, "You think you know about power. I'm going to turn this upside down and show you another kind of power—the power of surrender, the power of mercy, the infinite power of grace." That's why Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey and not a white charger, reminding us that the definition of power has been changed once and forever.

Does this make sense to you?

## WITH YOU GOD

By Wyatt Myers

at night with you  
my soul dances among the stars  
walking with you  
my soul skips through the ancient forests  
watching the sun climb out of the sea with you  
dives my soul to depths unknown  
meditating with you  
expands my soul till it knows no end  
talking with you  
explores the inner workings of my soul  
laughing with you  
gives my soul delight  
crying with you  
eases my soul's pain  
singing with you  
releases the song of my soul  
living with you  
makes my soul complete



## YOUR \$1 BILL



At the start of our Stewardship Campaign this year, on Sunday, October 11th, the Stewardship Committee tucked a \$1 bill into every Bulletin and told people during worship to

give their \$1 bill away. But there was a catch. The goal was to give it away anonymously--meaning the receiver did not know she/he was receiving the gift and could not thank the giver. People did some quite remarkable things and were very creative (we heard the reports the next Sunday in Church). Here are a few written reports we received about what folks did with their one dollar bills!

### **From Kayla Gilman-Solomon** "The Northampton Parking Fairy"

Since I have a window overlooking Main Street in Northampton, I regularly watch people struggling to find change for the parking meters. That's why I chose to be a dollar worth of change into the parking machine. It tickled me so much to do it that I put in another 50 cents the next day! Hm-m-m-m-m-m-m, maybe I will become the parking fairy.

### **From Lynn Fogg**

I was in Big Y shopping just after Church. I had a coupon for yogurt that I could not use. I left the coupon tucked on the shelf for someone else to use and then I thought of the \$1 that I needed to give away. So I tucked that under the coupon and doubled the \$1 value for someone else to find.

### **From Martha Smith**

My Bulletin was empty! Nuts! But my favorite way to give away dollar bills is in the tip jars of students working at coffee joints.

### **From Paula Spencer**

While at my follow-up appointment with my eye doctor, I stopped at the little in-house pharmacy, found the pain meds section and put the \$1 bill with the Ibuprofen boxes with a note saying: "This is for you!" The money was gone by the time I left the building. For me, the amazing thing was that a small act of generosity (even though it wasn't my \$1) opened a floodgate to the joy of giving and I have been extra generous with donations, tips, etc. since then. It feels wonderful to give!

### **From Kathleen Kent**

I forgot that I was given a dollar until last Sunday. So this week I put it inside a 500 piece jigsaw puzzle box that I gave to the Church Fair Tag Sale. I am glad I put the dollar in the box because I did not get to tell the buyer that I think there's a piece missing.

### **From Jo Cannon**

I stuck the bill in an open pocket of a student's backpack.

### **From Annie Warner**

I left my dollar as an extra tip under a plate for our waitress. She was very good and sometimes people barely tip or not at all. As the song goes, "She works hard for the money!"

### **From Ann Podolske**

I attended an enormous going-away dinner for a woman at my office last week, and when the tab came around, I slipped it (and a few "companions") in to pad the tip for our waitress when no one was paying attention. A former (and terrible) waitress, I do that whenever I am able. I did not get thanked, for I left before the tab was picked up (about as sneaky as I get).

## **AT THE END OF THE DAY: A MIRROR OF QUESTIONS**

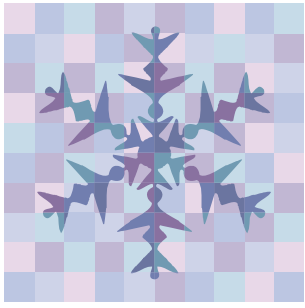
By John O'Donohue

What dreams did I create last night?  
Where did my eyes linger today?  
Where was I blind?  
Where was I hurt without anyone noticing?  
What did I learn today?  
What did I read?  
What new thoughts visited me?  
What differences did I notice in those closest to me?  
Whom did I neglect?  
Where did I neglect myself?  
What did I begin today that might endure?  
How were my conversations?  
What did I do today for the poor and the excluded?  
Did I remember the dead today?  
Where could I have exposed myself to the risk of something different?  
Where did I allow myself to receive love?  
With whom today did I feel most myself?  
What reached me today? How deep did it imprint?  
Who saw me today?  
What visitations had I from the past and from the future?  
What did I avoid today?  
From the evidence – why was I given this day?



## RE-MAKING CHRISTMAS: A WORKSHOP

By Annie Turner



How many of you in this congregation are already dreading Christmas? Do you flinch at the impossibly bright and happy sounds of Christmas music in stores? Does the thought of an imminent family gathering make you break out in a cold sweat? And would you far rather jump on a cruise ship which will put you somewhere far out in the Atlantic when that impossible holiday occurs?

Many of us are familiar with this feeling of gloom which can appear as early as October. For many of us, the reality of Christmas is not particularly happy or joyful: Our holiday memories may include Dad on a bender; Mom out of sight; siblings in a death-struggle for attention; and relatives who really should have been put out to pasture decades ago. Such past experiences can make it extremely difficult to muster even a smidgeon of joy for the coming holidays.

But it doesn't have to be this way! Based on my experience in helping a former "Christmas-dreader" to become someone who actually enjoys portions of this holiday—and based on my own experience with the healing of memories and developing rituals which work--this workshop will offer tools to help its participants re-imagine Christmas, take some of the charge off those toxic memories, and build rituals which are meaningful for us.

1/ A series of **Exercises** will help participants look at painful holiday memories—acknowledge them—and then let them go. (A Buddhist approach on dealing with wounding thoughts will be explored, as well as looking at the importance of prayer.)

2/ We will look at **Self-care** during this time, so that we can learn how to care for ourselves in better, healthier ways which build up our strength for the coming season. (This will be a quick overview of: exercise, nutrition, meditation and prayer habits, social connections, and soothing the body.)

3/ Then we will **Re-imagine or Re-make Christmas** into a time which, instead of lacerating us, helps us and strengthens us. We will look at possible rituals you can develop, using your own imagination and experiences, as well as looking at alternatives to the *Hell in the shape of Christmas* event.

From leading many workshops over the years, I have come

to believe that each person holds within the secret of healing and the direction you need to move in.

**Time:** December 13, Sunday, 1:00-3:00.

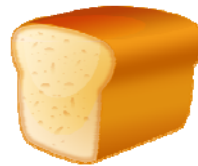
**Place:** Church Dining Room

**Tools:** bring an object (or a photo, letter, etc.) which symbolizes past Christmases.



## FROM CHARITY TO CHANGE

By Susan Farrell



For our November meeting, the Charity to Change group worked on two ideas - the creation of a Haydenville Congregation Church member Business Directory and our first Community meal (first for this group - I know this church has a long tradition of community meals).

The first document for the Business Directory will be a simple page of "business cards" for the first group who have signed on. It will be a single sheet for now and will be attached to a church bulletin sometime in November to show members how it works and who has participated. We anticipate that the listing will grow and take on different forms. This felt like the easiest way to start.

The community meal comes out of our desire to reach out to folks in the hilltowns who would enjoy a good meal and evening of socializing. The New England winter months can be isolating and we thought this would be a lovely way to create a community for new and old friends. Susan Farrell and Sarah Icklan and members of Sarah's band will sing and play music during dessert. The date is set for December 10 from 5-7pm in the Dining Room of the Church. Pre- registration will help us prepare the right amount of food and there will be free will donations to cover some of the expense. Bread Euphoria will donate bread. Rides will be offered to the elderly who are not comfortable driving in the evening.

## DECEMBER CALENDAR

December 2:	5 – 6:30 PM	A Special Bible Study series “ <i>Bible for Vital Congregations</i> ” HCC Dining Room with Pastor Andrea
December 5:	2 PM	A Service to Celebrate the Life of Dr. L. Fred Ayvazian. Reception to follow in the HCC Dining Room. All members and friends of the Church are warmly invited to attend
December 6:	10 AM	Worship Service, Second Sunday in Advent, Lighting the Advent Wreath, Communion Service. Everyone is invited to stay after Church and help decorate the Sanctuary for Christmas and Advent
December 6:	4:30 PM	An evening of dinner and fellowship, at the home of Dawn Orluske, for Children’s Church families in preparation for the holiday season. See Assistant Pastor Matilda or Dawn Orluske
December 7:	5:45 PM	Deacons’ Meeting
December 8:	6:30 PM	Trustees’ Meeting
December 9:	5 – 6:30 PM	A Special Bible Study series “ <i>Bible for Vital Congregations</i> ” HCC Dining Room with Pastor Andrea
December 10:	5 – 7:00 PM	Community Supper, everyone invited, HCC Dining Room, Sponsored by “From Charity to Change”. Pre-registration required. Rides available.
December 12:	9:30 AM	Church book Group Meeting reading “The Strength in What Remains” by Tracy Kidder, place (TBA)
December 13:	10 AM	Worship Service, Third Sunday in Advent, Lighting the Advent Wreath
December 13:	1 – 3:00 PM	Re-Making Christmas, HCC Dining Room with Ann Turner
December 14:	4:30 PM 5:30 PM 6:30 PM 6:30 PM	Youth Group, HCC Dining Room Green Task Force meeting, HCC Children’s Church Space Children’s Church Committee Meeting, Church sanctuary Living the Questions DVD Series #2, Church Dining Room
December 15:	6 PM	Advent Dinner for the Men in the Church with Pastor Andrea, Dining Room
December 16:	5 – 6:30 PM	A Special Bible Study series “ <i>Bible for Vital Congregations</i> ” HCC Dining Room with Pastor Andrea
December 17:	1 PM	Ladies Aid Annual Christmas Party, HCC Dining Room
December 20:	10 AM	Children Lead Worship Service, Fourth Sunday in Advent, Lighting The Advent Wreath
December 21:	6:30 PM	Living the Questions DVD Series #2, Church Dining Room
December 24:	7 PM	Christmas Eve Service singing “Silent Night” by candlelight to close the service
December 25:		Merry Christmas to our Church Family
December 27:	10 AM	Worship Service
December 28:	6:30 PM	Living the Questions DVD Series #2, Church Dining Room



# Haydenville Congregational Church

United Church of Christ  
143 Main Street, PO Box 257  
Haydenville, MA 01039



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

- December 2 Laurie Priest
- December 6 Patty Albright & Maureen Mathers
- December 7 Michael Jacobson-Hardy
- December 8 Sean McElligott
- December 9 Cathy Strader
- December 10 Ann Turner & Lynn Goodhue
- December 12 Jerry Roberge
- December 13 Talya Gilman-Solomon
- December 14 Nate McElligott & Anna Faye Morin
- December 16 Sarah Molano
- December 17 Ayana Pierre-Maxwell
- December 21 Grace Molano
- December 23 Julianna Donofrio
- December 27 Regina Kaufman
- December 31 Martha Smith

## CHURCH FAIR

By Maureen Mathers

The October Church Fair raised a total of \$3,756.32

The income was down a bit and we recognize that the economy is poor, people's spending is very practical and the social-economic makeup of community is changing. We need to look at buying trends of community for future needs and interest. Changes are coming! Thank you to all who gave of resources time and talents. The Ladies Aid wants to know: what do you look for when you go to a Fair? What would appeal to young people? What did you like best when you went to other fairs?

Thanks to one and all.